# News Release
# Communiqué

Ontario

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ministère de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée

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**PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT JOIN FORCES WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE HOSPITAL SERVICES FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN JAMES BAY**

*Historic Agreement Paves Way For Weeneebayko Area Health Authority*

MOOSE FACTORY ISLAND - The tri-party agreement signed by the province, federal government and local leaders today will help improve the health of the James Bay Aboriginal communities by paving the way for the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority, said George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

"This momentous agreement will help to bring high-quality health care services to the people living on the James Bay coast," said Smitherman. "The new Weeneebayko Area Health Authority will serve the 11,000 residents of this coastal area to ensure they can access the best possible care, closer to home."

The government is supporting the merger of the federal Weeneebayko General Hospital and the provincial James Bay General Hospital. The Weeneebayko Area Health Authority (WAHA) will integrate provincially funded health programs such as acute care emergency, dialysis, diabetes, community mental health and physician services with federally funded First Nation health programs such as primary care and community health services.

"This is a great day for people of the James Bay coast communities," said Kashechewan First Nation Chief Jonathan Solomon, who Chaired the community Steering Committee. "We are delighted the government is supporting the amalgamation of these two hospitals to create a single health-care system that will better serve the needs of the people in the Mushkegowuk Territory."

Since August 2005, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has been in tri-party negotiations with the Steering Committee's negotiation team and Health Canada to develop a legal agreement. This new agreement supports a framework for the establishment of a single health-care organization for the James Bay coast area.

This is just one more example of how, working together, Ontarians have achieved results in health care services for Aboriginal communities in the province. Other initiatives include:

- $6 million per year for expansion and enhancement of long-term-care community support services in First Nations communities;
- $5 million per year enhancement for Aboriginal mental health programs to provide community-based services for people with serious mental illness;
- Providing an additional $1 million per year to support the implementation of the Aboriginal Diabetes Strategy;
- An additional $5 million per year for the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy, to which the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care contributes over $25 million annually;

- $250,000 to the Institute of Aboriginal People's Health/Canadian Institutes of Health Research to support research on the prevention, identification, and/or treatment of cardiovascular disease or mental illness in Aboriginal women in Ontario.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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